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Organized Labor

Its Struggles,
Its Enemies and Fool Friends.

:: BY ::
SAMUEL GOMPERS,
PRESIDENT, AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR.



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ORGANIZED LABOR.

Its Struggles, Its Enemies and Fool Friends.

There is no necessity to worry about how labor and capital can be reconciled, for they are one and the same. How the *laborers* and the *capitalists* can be reconciled is entirely within the scope of proper inquiry, and to which the attention of both and of all students of economics and devotees to the social welfare may well give their best thought and attention. And it may lead to the conclusion that despite the clamor which we hear, and the conflicts which occasionally occur, that there is a constant trend toward agreement between the laborers and capitalists, employed and employer, for the uninterrupted production and distribution of wealth, and, too, with ethical consideration for the common interests of all the people.

No body of men deplores strikes more than do the organized workers, and one of their chief aims is to endeavor to reduce the number, if not to entirely obliterate strikes; but thinking men have no sympathy with the unqualified condemnation with which the delettante in society, the professoriate, the open and covert enemies of the workers, denounce them.

A strike or lockout is a disagreement between the buyer and seller of labor power in order to arrive at what each or both may determine to be a more rational and equitable condition upon which production and distribution shall proceed. There has never yet been full harmony between the buyers and sellers of anything in this world. When a strike or lockout occurs, wages and production are not destroyed; they are deferred.

Since the era of modern industry, there have always been periods or seasons of great activity in industry, followed by periods or seasons of stagnation and idleness.

Strikes simply defer the production from one season to another.

Production in the aggregate of an entire year has never yet been diminished by a strike.

Organized workers seek to reduce strikes by being the better prepared for them.

Strikes of unorganized or newly organized workers always arouse the greatest bitterness on both sides.

The employer who has been master of all he surveys looks upon his employes as servile servants, from whom the slightest request or protest is taken to be an attack upon his prerogative and privilege. To him it is dictation, which he resents in the most autocratic fashion.

The unorganized or newly organized workers have always looked upon themselves as entirely impotent, and therefore unable to secure redress for any wrongs which may have been inflicted upon them. Their comparatively low condition and sufferings have made them desperate; and when in their unity a new found power dawns upon them, the situation is completely changed, and they regard their employers as powerless to resist any demand, and themselves as almighty.

After the first contest, both have learned a lesson; and if the workers maintain their organization, they find that neither side possesses all the power nor all the responsibility. They have mutual respect for each other, and enter into mutual agreements.

The best organized workers, those who are better prepared to enter into strikes or to resist lockouts, are those who have least occasion to engage in them, and yet are the greater beneficiaries from modern civilization in the form of higher wages, shorter hours of daily labor, and Sunday rest. They attain a higher plane of morality, economic, political and social independence.

Thousands of agreements reached, the many more thousands of strikes averted through organization, are lost sight of by the sophists and superficial observers, and strikes regarded as the sum total, the Alpha and Omega of the labor movement, when, as a matter of fact, as already indicated, strikes are a few of the failures to agree on terms upon which industry shall be continued.

While some may assert that the strike is a relic of barbarism,

I answer that the strike is the most highly civilized method which the workers, the wealth producers, have yet devised to protest against the wrong and injustice, and to demand the enforcement of the right.

The strike compels more attention and study into economic and social wrongs than all the essays that have been written. It establishes better relations between the contending parties than have theretofore existed; reconciles laborers and capitalists more effectually, and speeds the machinery for production to a greater extent; gives an impetus to progress and increases power.

If the bitter attacks which are made upon strikes and trade unions were to be taken seriously, we would imagine ourselves in the midst of barbarism, and the United States the last in the procession of the industrial nations of the world.

There exists organization in China, bound by oath and superstition; but there is no organized labor movement there. Centuries of hunger have stultified the race, not satisfied it; curbed and compressed them; not expanded or broadened them—servility and physical cowardice are their attributes.

China is "a country without strikes;" and so long as our present industrial system shall last, a country without strikes must of necessity be like China, or tend toward that goal.

Language fails me to express how earnest are the organized workers in their desire to avoid and to reduce the number of strikes; but as one associated with the labor movement of America, and who has given more than thirty years of life to the study of economics; the history of the struggles of the workers of the world; who has participated with them in their glories as well as their defeats, I am happy in being in mental company with Abraham Lincoln when he said: "Thank God, we have a system of labor where there can be a strike. Whatever the pressure, there is a point where the workingman may stop."

I trust that the day will never come when the workers, the wealth producers of our country and our time will surrender their right to strike. The attacks on labor organizations and strikes are repetitions of the old cry of *laissez faire*, "let well enough alone," which is as old as the hills, and just as easily susceptible to an advance step or a progressive thought. The same cry went up when women in England, half-naked,

worked on all fours in the mines, and seldom left them except to give birth to a child of whose paternity they themselves were in doubt, and to be returned to the clay from whence they came.

In the early part of this century, when the organized workers made the first attempt to secure relief or a remedy for this brutal condition of affairs, the same cry went up from the faddists, theorists and effeminate men. Then, as now, even some of the dignitaries of the church held up their hands in holy horror, and denounced the attempt of the labor organizations to secure parliamentary relief, and declared that it was an attempt against the Divine Will to prevent these women from earning their bread. The conscience of England's law makers was aroused and quickened by the mighty protest of the toiling masses of that country, and the barbarous practice was abolished.

In our own country, the attempt made years ago to save the women and children from the mines and mills and factories and workshops was met with the same hue and cry; and now we face the same protest, and from the same source, when we are attempting to save the children of the Southern states from the brutal greed and avarice of dividend maniacs, not only who are residing in the South, but particularly Northern and Eastern holders of securities in the Southern mills. The same crass ignorance and vile avarice prompted the Alabama legislature six years ago to repeal the law limiting the labor of children under twelve years of age to sixty hours a week.

The strike of the textile workers of Danville in 1901 for the maintenance of the 10-hour-a-day law of Virginia was resisted by all the powers that could be brought against the men and women there, when, in the language of that departed statesman, "all the resources of civilization" were brought into play, the finer art of slow and cruel starvation was used as the means of defeating those who stood for right and justice and for humanity.

In this world of ours those who do not make themselves heard have no grievance to redress. Those who are not willing to bear burdens and even temporary sacrifices in striking for their rights may be given a passing word of sympathy; books and essays may be written upon social inequalities, and the awful condition of the slums; but they are usually

"passed by on the other side," and left in their squalor and misery. The workers, or the people of a nation who, knowing their rights, have the courage and the fortitude and the willingness to assert and defend them, are always the most respected among the peoples on the face of the earth.

For more than twenty-five years the miners in the anthracite coal regions were being degraded. Who gave them attention but the organized workers? When at last through the efforts of organized labor the miners were aroused from their lethargy, determined to strike, and did strike, despite the popular notion that they had lost all courage and would not strike, 170,000 of them gave notice to the world that if coal was to be mined, the men were entitled to at least a living wage as a condition precedent. Universal sympathy was aroused in their favor, and it resulted in a concession and a victory which all the world agrees made for the social and moral uplifting of the entire communities in which the miners lived.

Organized labor stands for:

1. Organization.
2. Conciliation.
3. Arbitration.

We know that without organization, conciliation and arbitration are a delusion and a snare.

The combination of the employers, the wealth possessors of America, has progressed at a very rapid rate. The workers have no fear because of these combinations. They are realizing that in order to protect and promote their interests today, and to vouchsafe their liberty and freedom for the future, it is essential for them to unite and federate.

Out of the two united forces there is a constantly growing tendency toward mutual agreements, lasting for a stated period during which industrial disturbances are avoided ; representatives of both sides engage in adjusting the differences arising from the constant transition in machinery and methods of production ; and they meet annually or biennially to again discuss conditions upon which industrial peace may be continued for a like period.

The workers are sometimes accused of unwillingness to make concessions. To this we answer that so far as it is possible, the workers ought not to concede ; in fact, their conditions are such that they have exceedingly little to concede.

The cry of the toilers is for More! The organized movement of the workers is to obtain more of the advantages which result not only from their labor, but from the combined genius of the past and present.

The movement of labor organization began with those who, through the rudest form of association, pledged to each other the effort to lighten their burdens, mitigate their woes, and resist the common oppressor. It has moved along with the increased aspirations, wants and demands of the most intelligent among us.

None will dispute that the trade unions comprise the most moral and intelligent of the working class; that they represent the highest practical hopes, and aim to achieve them in the most reasonable and civilized manner.

All really educated and honest men admit that the thorough organization of the wage-workers tends to render employment and the means of subsistence less precarious, and secures a larger share of the fruits of their toil.

Organized labor helps to reduce class, race, creed, and political prejudices. It aids and supports its fellow-workers morally and financially. It raises wages and lowers usury. It fosters education, and uproots ignorance; increases independence, and decreases dependence. It develops manhood, and balks tyranny. It shortens hours of toil and lengthens life. It lightens and brightens man. It establishes fraternity, and discourages blind selfishness. It makes manhood more independent, womanhood more beautiful and healthful, and childhood more hopeful and bright. It cheers the home, and tends to make the world better.

Unions of labor endow the workers with individual dignity, and individual freedom. The unions prescribe a minimum, living wage; not a maximum wage. They insist upon a living rate, and never interfere with an employer desiring to reward superior skill or merit, the charge of labor's enemies to the contrary notwithstanding.

Where are the evidences or manifestations then of harm done by organized labor? Production has more than kept pace with population, and the growing demands at home or abroad.

The toilers will contest for full and unqualified recognition of all their rights. They will win in the future as they have won in the past. Nor will they transgress beyond the limits

of legal and strictly industrial warfare. Not one school of political economy in any era of our industrial and commercial life has advanced the wage-earners one jot in their material interests. It has been the persistent plodding and sacrifices of the organized labor movement which has secured for the workers a general discussion of their rights and their wrongs, and has given the keynote and proven the open sesame to the student in all the walks of life.

In this era of industrial development and concentration, the individual worker acting for himself is accorded neither rights nor consideration. His share in the result of the product of his toil is the desideratum which depends upon the generosity of the average employer, a basis so preposterous that no reasonable, thinking man can defend it.

Some well meaning persons, and others not quite so friendly disposed, have urged upon the workers compulsory arbitration as a means to end industrial strife. The most pronounced advocate of that system in America is one who, though well-intentioned, has in turn advocated as many different remedies for our social ills as the human mind has evolved, and has written successively to the utter confusion of his previously proclaimed theories.

Another advocates compulsory arbitration for New Zealand, and while loud in its praises, hesitates in his advocacy of its acceptance in the United States; while the author of the law in New Zealand recently declared that it must be either curbed, modified or repealed.

It may not be known to the advocates of compulsory arbitration that in the fifteenth century there was a species of compulsory arbitration in vogue in Great Britain where the courts determined upon the wages and conditions of employment.

To the student of history it is an open book that the workers of Great Britain in that time were practically enslaved; that industry was hampered, and only through violent revolution was a change brought about by which the laborers were permitted to quit their employment at will, and from that period began by slow and painful processes the industrial progress of Great Britain.

Compulsory arbitration is the very antithesis of freedom and order and progress. On the one hand it means confisca-

tion of property; on the other it involves slavery, and the enforcement of either or both would be the beginning of the end, the death knell of the industrial and commercial superiority of America.

No one pretends that our present industrial life is the ideal one, but that it is the best that has yet been evolved in the history of the world, no sane man will deny. The organized labor movement, the industrial and commercial advancement to which we have attained even by our crude methods ought to be a sufficient answer to those who, by a patent process, imagine they can cure all the ills of mankind in the twinkling of an eye, or by the enactment of a law.

The point of success and superiority which we have reached, together with the bungling which the politicians, misnamed statesmen, have made of any attempt to deal with industrial affairs, ought to be a sufficient warrant to all earnest, right-thinking Americans to insist that political jugglery ought to be kept free at least from the industrial affairs of our people.

Despite the progress made and the vantage position we occupy, the hearts of all sincere men yearn for the better day, when the industrial strife and bitter feeling engendered by our economic development may be assuaged. In hoping and striving for that time, it is a libel upon the efforts of all to disparage and discredit the success already achieved. Each effort made and thought given toward solving the problems which confront us day by day are all tending toward the goal for which the whole past of the human race has been but one continuous preparatory struggle. Encourage the organization of the workers; help to make the path of progress easier, and lift up the hands of those who are endeavoring to bring about economic and social progress upon the lines of least resistance, conforming to the very best expressed thoughts and efforts for practical amelioration and final emancipation.

Pamph Gompers, Samuel
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Apr 9/43	A. Vakay, noted
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